

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case File No.: AA-084078
AK-040-03-EA-004

Applicant: Learn To Return Training Systems

Type of
Action: Special Recreation Permit
Commercial Outdoor Survival Training

Location: Campbell Tract Special Recreation Area

Prepared By: Douglas Ballou
Outdoor Recreation Planner

Preparing
Office: Bureau of Land Management
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I. INTRODUCTION

The Campbell Tract (CT) is a 730 acre Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) of natural, mostly wooded, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land located within the city limits of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). The primary purpose of the tract is to support the administrative functions and offices for the Anchorage Field Office (AFO) of the BLM. The CT is centered around the Campbell Airstrip, a 5000' gravel runway dating to 1942, that is used by the AFO and other agencies for various government purposes. The CT also supports the Campbell Creek Science Center (CCSC), a BLM environmental education center that serves approximately 25,000 area students annually. The CT serves as an outdoor activity, study, and classroom area for the CCSC.

The CT contains over 11 miles of multi-use non-motorized trails that provide year-round recreational opportunities for approximately 40,000 area users. The CT is adjacent to, and managed in cooperation with, the 4000-acre MOA Far North Bicentennial Park (FNBP), forming a contiguous piece of natural public land linking the high mountains of Chugach State Park to the heart of Anchorage.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Professional survival training is presented to individuals who may be exposed to future wilderness and emergency survival situations. The training prepares participants to handle life-threatening survival situations by providing classroom knowledge and hands-on outdoor skills in outdoor education and survival techniques. Although the classroom portions of this training are presented off-site, the need exists for a natural, wilderness-like setting to practice field skills in close proximity to Anchorage.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

This action is in conformance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), March 1980.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

Permits for commercial recreation use are regulated by 43 CFR 8372. With this regulation an applicant may be authorized to conduct commercial recreation activities on BLM-administered land. The Authorized Officer may issue Special Recreation Permits for up to ten years subject to annual re-authorization. The permittee must satisfactorily meet the requirements associated with the Special Recreation Permit as well as conform with applicable laws and regulations pertaining to CT.

Guidelines for use of the CT are found in "A Management Plan for Public Use

and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility” (June, 1988).

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to conduct commercial outdoor education and survival field training classes on the CT SRMA. The Anchorage-based commercial survival school, Learn to Return Systems (LTRS), seeks to hold approximately 20 outdoor education field training sessions on CT annually, serving a maximum of 20 students per session. LTRS develops and presents five different survival training workshops at their facility at 230 East Potter Drive in Anchorage including Aviation and Water Survival, Arctic Land Survival, Primary Aviation Survival, Navigation and Rough-land Travel, and Survival Medicine. To demonstrate outdoor and emergency skills in a natural setting close to their classroom in support of the above workshops, LTRS utilizes two BLM-designated sites on CT. The action is subject to standard stipulations for CT including adhering to Leave No Trace principles, prohibition of training activities on the Campbell Airstrip and AFO core administrative area, and other stipulations related to this particular use.

LTRS seeks to utilize a day-use training site located just east of the Campbell Airstrip on CT (see map) for demonstrating practical application of outdoor and survival skills including emergency shelter construction, map reading and orienteering, emergency fire building, food and water procurement, signaling, and emergency first aid. LTRS plans to utilize a circular area approximately 25 yards in diameter to conduct these field activities. LTRS intends to build a sample emergency lean-to type shelter on the site out of native spruce boughs that are imported onto CT. To reduce impacts on the site, LTRS seeks to maintain the sample shelter on the training site for use by multiple sessions, to be removed annually in June. During each field training session, each class participant will construct a single, small practice fire in a BLM-approved fire pan from down and dead organic materials collected on the CT site. One larger group training fire will also be built per session to demonstrate fire-building techniques to the group. This fire will be constructed on a fireproof surface and fire fuels will be composed of native vegetation that has been imported to the CT. All evidence of these training fires will be removed from CT at the end of each session.

LTRS seeks to use a second BLM-designated training site located east of the Campbell Airstrip, 500 yards north of the day-use site. This site is used for approximately five overnight field sessions that occur only during the snow season to demonstrate emergency camping skills. The site is approximately 25 yards in diameter. In addition to conducting the exact training activities as

described above, session participants will construct temporary emergency shelters from down and dead vegetation found on-site and live native organic materials that are imported to the training site by LTRS, and physically sleep in the shelters overnight. These temporary shelters will be dismantled at the end of each training session.

All litter and solid human waste will be removed from the site at the end of each training session during the non-snow season. Reasonable efforts will also be made to remove waste from snow-season training sites at the end of each training session. LTRS will perform a clean-up of both sites by June of each year to remove all litter, human waste, lost gear, and discarded construction materials revealed by snowmelt.

LTRS also plans to demonstrate emergency hand-held and aerial flare signaling devices on CT during all training sessions. They plan to use these devices at a cleared location east of the airstrip that has been designated by the authorized BLM representative. Flare and fire use will not occur during periods of MOA fire bans, or without the express permission from the authorized BLM representative on a session per session basis. When flare use is permitted, LTRS will notify the following agencies on the day of the training to prevent the flares from being misinterpreted as bona-fide civilian emergencies: Alaska State Troopers, MOA Fire Dispatch, MOA Police Department, Chugach State Park, FAA - Ted Stevens' International Airport, FAA Merrill Field, and the BLM Unit Aviation Manager.

Access to CT will occur on the CCSC road and parking is authorized in the CCSC visitor parking lot. LTRS will be issued a key to the CCSC gate for weekend access and are prohibited from any entry through the CCSC gate during non-business hours without specific, pre-authorized approval from the BLM representative on a case-by-case basis.

Day-use classes utilize CT for four hours per session and overnight users for 24 hours per session resulting in a total of 320 annual user days.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to deny issuing the necessary special recreation permit to enable use of the area for commercial outdoor training courses. Management practices and resource uses would remain the same.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

It has been determined that the following Critical Elements are either not present

or would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Cultural/Paleontological Resources, Environmental Justice, Farmlands (prime or unique), Floodplains, Invasive, Non-native Species, Native American Religious Concerns, Subsistence, Threatened and Endangered Species, Wastes (Hazardous/Solid), Water Quality (Surface and Ground), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness.

1. Cultural Resources:

The CT contains scattered World War II remains dating from 1942 when a 5,000 foot military airstrip and support facilities were constructed to support nearby Ft. Richardson. War related improvements included an airstrip, taxiways, and revetments for aircraft use and various sod structures for housing and administrative functions including quarters, a kitchen and mess hall, latrines, and guard posts. These facilities were constructed from sod and locally available materials due to a shortage of building supplies and now appear as shallow pits and earth mounds covered with vegetation and overgrown concrete foundations with occasional scattered boards and nails. Most of these cultural sites and remains lie off the north end of the existing Campbell Airstrip.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species:

No threatened or endangered species are known to be found on the CT.

3. Subsistence:

The CT lands are Federal Public Land as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 810 and fall under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board and the Subsistence Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. The CT lies within the Anchorage Management Unit of Game Management Unit 14C under which the current Subsistence Regulations noted above is closed to the taking of wildlife under both State (hunting and trapping) and Federal Subsistence Regulations. The taking of wildlife on the CT is further limited by Supplemental Rules issued on November 20, 1998 under 43 CFR 8365.1-6 that closed the CT to the use of firearms, archery equipment, traps, or snares. The CT has no documented consistent use by rural Alaskans of fish or game and no knowledge of such use has become available since the inception of the Federal Subsistence Program or the issuance of the noted Supplementary Rules.

B. Recreation:

The CT is designated for non-motorized recreational use. Recreation

management for the CT is directed by the June 1988 “A Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility”. There are approximately 11 miles of developed recreation trails on CT. Some of these trails link to a wider trail system on the adjoining MOA FNB. The proximity of the CT to urban Anchorage places high demands on the site from a variety of users. Most recreation occurs on trails that were developed on old tank roads and airplane taxiways.

Access for recreation use on CT is gained from three formal on-site trailheads and four trails entering from FNB. Established trailheads with parking include the Smoke Jumper Trailhead located at the main Campbell Tract Facility AFO complex entrance, the Campbell Airstrip Trailhead located at mile 1.1 on Campbell Airstrip Road, and the Lore Road Trailhead located on Abbott Loop Road, one half mile south of the main BLM entrance road. Trail maintenance, signing, and event permitting is a cooperative effort between the BLM, MOA Parks Department, and various volunteers and user groups.

Recreation users are primarily residents of Anchorage and surrounding communities. Estimated 2002 visitation was 40,000 user days. Users are typically found walking, running, mountain biking, skiing, snowshoeing, dog mushing and horseback riding throughout the CT. Many users live close to CT and use the area regularly for exercise, often with their family dogs. Regular competitive events, often starting on FNB lands traverse CT including the Nordic Ski Club’s Tour of Anchorage and the World Sled Dog Championship Races.

C. Vegetation:

The CT contains a variety of habitats including spruce and birch forests, bogs, and riparian areas. Cottonwood and birch dating to the WWII era dominate the woodlands, interspersed with less mature white spruce, numbers of which have experienced high rates of recent beetle kill. The understory is comprised of shrubs, forbs, lichens and moss above a ground cover of heavy organic litter.

D. Wildlife:

The CT contains a rich diversity of resident and non-resident wildlife. Resident species include moose, porcupine, mink, weasel, red squirrel, muskrat, beaver, snowshoe hare, voles, and shrews and at least 50 species of resident and non-resident birds including horned owl, northern saw-whet owl, boreal owl, northern goshawk, and spruce grouse. Non-resident species moving seasonally through CT to and from the Chugach Mountains to the east include grizzly bear and black bear, red fox, lynx and wolf. The South Fork of Campbell Creek traverses the northeast corner of CT. This stream supports populations of king and silver

salmon, as well as rainbow trout, Dolly varden, and spiny sculpin.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Cultural Resources:

Existing cultural resources may be damaged from people walking over them, crumbling debris mounds and collapsing pit walls during the non-winter season. When the ground is frozen, people will have little impact on these surface resources. Individual human-waste “cat-holes” excavated on cultural sites could also destroy cultural resources. Campfires built upon cultural sites could damage cultural resources in any season. Surface artifacts are often exposed by natural soil processes and could be removed from the site by individuals attending training sessions.

2. Recreation:

Users on CT are often seeking the solitude and quiet of the wooded tract to escape the noise and congestion of Anchorage. Training and camping activities near the multi-use trails will visually impact upon the visitor experience and reduce this sense of peace and solitude. Users viewing training sites may gain a false impression that general camping is permitted on the tract. Training activities may also increase noise levels for users if conducted near multi-use trails.

3. Vegetation:

Trampling of vegetation and/or compaction of snow at training sites, up to 50 meters in diameter, will occur. Trails leading to and from course sites may be visible from access areas. Other users may follow these foot trails to training sites causing increased trampling and impacts to areas of sensitive habitat or vegetation. Some individual tree branches may suffer damage from being cut by students.

4. Wildlife:

Outdoor training sessions may have local, short-term impacts on CT wildlife. In winter months, moose, snowshoe hare and other animals that browse and use forested habitats may be temporarily displaced.

Populations of birds and mammals may be impacted by training activities that occur in the animals feeding or reproductive habitat. Birds may not reproduce or leave the area for the season if disturbed during breeding season. Wildlife encounters may occur in all seasons. Moose and bear are potentially dangerous. Streamside activities could impact spawning salmon and increase

siltation downstream.

B. Impacts of No Action Alternative:

If Learn To Return Systems does not conduct training activities on the CT, there will be no impacts on the environment or users.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

An increase in human use to the existing use patterns on CT will result in greater impacts on vegetation and wildlife.

D. Mitigation Measures:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Cultural Resources:

Locate training sites in areas where cultural resources are not present. Increase instructor awareness of value and types of cultural resources found on CT. Require formal briefings for all training participants on prohibitions of disturbing or destroying cultural resources prior to field exercises. Prohibit digging of “cat-holes” and require removal of human waste from the site.

2. Recreation:

Locate training sites away from heavily used multi-use trails to reduce impact on other user’s recreation experience. Locate training sites in areas that also project the least possible amount of noise and human use impact to public trail areas. Designated training sites have been established on CT since the early 1990’s and their use is rotated seasonally. Trails to training sites will not be improved or enlarged to discourage other users from inadvertently encountering sites.

3. Vegetation:

Locate training sites and activity areas away from sensitive habitat areas including stream banks and areas of unique vegetation. Instruct participants on prohibition of cutting live vegetation during pre-field experience briefing. Vegetation brought in for simulated shelter construction must be natural to the area and not contain viable seed bearing structures.

4. Wildlife:

Activities should be scheduled when wildlife will be least impacted. Training sites should be rotated and class size should be limited to 20 individuals. Instructors should be informed on proper behavior when wildlife is encountered and briefed on any current sightings. Classes

should be relocated or rescheduled when encounters occur to reduce or eliminate injury to people or wildlife. Instructors should carry bear spray during spring, summer, and fall months.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

Douglas Ballou- Outdoor Recreation Planner

Donna Redding- Cultural Resources

Deborah Blank- Vegetation

Bruce Seppi- Wildlife

Ned Darling- CTF Maintenance

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